National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Socio-cultural reflections on heat in Australia with implications for health and climate change adaptation

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Australia has a hot climate with maximum summer temperatures in its major cities frequently exceeding 35 degrees C. Although 'heat waves' are an annual occurrence, the associated heat-related deaths among vulnerable groups, such as older people, suggest that Australians could be better prepared to deal with extreme heat. OBJECTIVE: To understand ways in which a vulnerable sub-population adapt their personal behaviour to cope with heat within the context of Australians' relationship with heat. DESIGN: We draw upon scientific, historical and literary sources and on a set of repeat interviews in the suburbs of Western Sydney with eight older participants and two focus group discussions. We discuss ways in which this group of older people modifies their behaviour to adapt to heat, and reflect on manifestations of Australians' ambivalence towards heat. RESULTS: Participants reported a number of methods for coping with extreme heat, including a number of methods of personal cooling, changing patterns of daily activity and altering dietary habits. The use of air-conditioning was near universal, but with recognition that increasing energy costs may become more prohibitive over time. CONCLUSIONS: While a number of methods are employed by older people to stay cool, these may become limited in the future. Australians' attitudes may contribute to the ill-health and mortality associated with excessive heat.

Source: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3475099

Resource Description

Communication: ☑

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience: ☑

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure : ☑

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

Temperature: Extreme Heat

Geographic Feature: ☑

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location: ☑

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact: ☑

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury

Intervention: ☑

strategy to prepare for or reduce the impact of climate change on health

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☑

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: ☑

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly

Resource Type: ☑

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience: ☑

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: ☑

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified